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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 001783

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/29/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: MELES/FRAZER REVIEW APPROACH TO SOMALIA

Classified By: A/S Jendayi Frazer for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary Frazer opened the meeting by telling Prime Minister Meles that we appreciate Ethiopia's restraint and contacts warning the Union of Islamic Courts (ICU) that Ethiopia would not tolerate an attack on Baidoa as the seat of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) nor countenance armed insurgents on its border. After Frazer laid out the results and rationale of the international Somalia Contact Group, Meles urged the USG to play a leading role in supporting the TFG with public statements and by supporting the lifting of the arms embargo so that the TFG could protect itself and the people of Somalia. He said that the best plan would be the formation of an IGAD peace force, but a fall back would be UNSC acceptance of the TFG support plan. Frazer said that the USG recognizes the TFG but that a consensus had not been reached on partially lifting the arms embargo. Meles underlined the fact that if the TFG crumbles or is attacked and flees, there will be no government entity around which moderate Somalis can rally. The ICU is not monolithic but made up of different interests that could result in division within the ICU. There are the economic and political interests of clans and sub-clans of which the Ayr are the strongest; there are the insurgents who hope to destabilize Ethiopia; and Islamists with a Fundamentalist ideology. Meles went on to point out that US and Ethiopian interests converge because the USG wants to stop Somalia from becoming a global threat and Ethiopia must stop Somalia from being used as a base to destabilize it. Ethiopia has reached out to the ICU and there have been some positive signs that the ICU will not attack Baidoa, however, should the ICU do so; Ethiopia will respond. Our meeting followed the seemingly successful conclusion of an agreement between the ICU and the TFG. Consequently, Meles was hopefully that a Somalia-Ethiopia conflict could be avoided. The subsequent reports that a Fundamentalist has taken over the ICU leadership will heighten the possibility of continued ICU expansion and conflict. End Summary

12. (C) Dr. Jendayi Frazer, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Charge Vicki Huddleston, Admiral Rick Hunt, and Special Assistants Kendra Gaither and Commander Sowa, and Somalia desk officer Nole Garey met with Prime Minister Meles, Ms. Almaz Chief of the European and North American Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on June 23. Ms. Almaz Ameha and Mr. Gerbrete Sai, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister accompanied the Prime Minister. Dr. Frazer extended greeting from President Bush and Secretary Rice to the Prime Minister. She then turned to the issue of the current turmoil in Somalia, pointing out that the Secretary is reconfiguring US policy on Somalia. In that context the

USG had formed, at the suggestion of Norway, an international Somalia Contact Group to share ideas and information among a small group of interested governments; its purpose was not decision making. The Arab League and IGAD will be observers at future meetings.

13. (C) Frazer said that the Contact Group and the USG support the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) as the legitimate government. Some in the contact Group would like the arms embargo on Somalia to be lifted, others were unsure. For this reason it is especially important for the international community to understand IGAD's concept for assisting militarily the TFG. The USG understands Ethiopia's position that there cannot be an extremist government in Somalia. But Ethiopia should not go into Somalia as it would be seen as support for TFG President Yusuf and could be used to whip up support for the Union of Islamic Courts (ICU). Frazer said that Ethiopia's strategy of preventing the ICU from attacking through deterrence is a good one, but warned, "Don't move preemptively." You have given the ICU your red lines and we've seen some positive impact of this on the ICU. Frazer pointed out that the copy cat Islamic Courts that are popping up in places such as Beledweyne on Ethiopia's border may not be the same as the ICU itself, but opportunist attempting to get on the right side of the ICU. The USG agrees with the region that we cannot permit a radical Islamic state to succeed in Somalia, but the moderates within the ICU must be given a chance. Frazer said that although the USG reserves judgment on the ICU, we continued to be greatly concerned about the three Al Qaida linked terrorists in Mogadishu. She

ADDIS ABAB 00001783 002 OF 004

pointed out that we will still go after these individuals but in a different manner.

14. (C) Prime Minister Meles responded that the silver lining in all this is that the USG is taking a direct interest in Somalia and in the region, "not burying its head in the sand," he said. Meles commended the USG initiatives: Frazer's visit to the region; and the US initiative in forming the Somalia Contact Group. He then laid out his view of the ICU and why Ethiopia believes its security and the region's is threatened. In Meles' view the ICU is composed of the following factions:

- A variety of Clan and Sub-Clan based groups and individuals with a variety of ideas and self-interests; some are ideologically driven some want union. The Hawiye Clan is the backbone of support for the ICU;

- Armed groups such as the OLF (Oromiya Liberation Front) and the ONLF (Ogaden National Liberation Front) that are conducting insurgencies in Ethiopia and along with the ICU are receiving training and arms from Eritrea;

- The Islamists who support a Jihad and have foreign fighters as well as Al Qaida operatives in Mogadishu.

15. Each of these three groups, according to Meles, pursues their own interests. The clans and sub-clans are driven by politics and economic gain. The Hawiye Clan over recent years had expropriated much of the property in Mogadishu that once belonged to other clans and sub clans. Ethiopia's strategy is to encourage the Hawiye Clan -- especially the base of ICU support -- the Ayr -- to break from the Islamists. However, this can only be successful if the Ayr do not fear that they will lose the economic and

political gains they have acquired in Mogadishu. The Islamists for their part are not driven by clan politics but by ideology. (Comment: Ethiopia's contacts with the Ayr are likely also designed to convince the Ayr that their interests can be just as successfully met by the TFG ((and Ethiopia)) as by the Islamists. End comment.)

16. (C) The USG and Ethiopia have parallel interests in Somalia, Meles said because of the confluence of regional and global interests. The US is driven by the global threat posed by the Islamists. Ethiopia while also concerned about the larger global terrorist threat, has specific national security interests because its territorial integrity is threatened by Ethiopian fighters allied to the ICU who are members of local insurgencies. Ethiopia's security requirements make it imperative that Ethiopia never allow an armed group in Somalia to have a base of operations near its borders. Meles said that to avoid this Ethiopia has twice entered and removed armed groups that threatened it from Somalia. The "Taliban" (the ICU) in Mogadishu poses a threat to Ethiopia, to the TFG, and to regional stability in Puntland and Somaliland. Although the TFG and Puntland are close -- the President of the TFG is from Puntland -- the TFG and Somaliland are not close. Both Puntland and Somaliland are concerned about the threat from the ICU. (Comment: Ethiopia is encouraging them to unite with Ethiopia against ICU further expansion. end comment.)

17. (C) Meles explained the rationale for Ethiopia's decision to respond to an ICU attack on Baidoa the TFG capital. In his view neither Ethiopia nor the international community can allow the TFG to be destroyed. If the TFG were destroyed there would be no rallying point around which the moderate elements could coalesce and confront the ICU and the Islamists. Therefore what Ethiopia is trying to do, "Is steady the ship so that the rats will not scramble to get off the sinking ship. Our going in is a risk we would take to prevent them (the ICU) from achieving their objective. But we prefer to warn them off," Meles explained. If Ethiopia can successfully warn-off the ICU from attacking Baidoa then the TFG can be strengthened militarily by the region. Currently the TFG needs protection from the outside because it lacks capacity. This can be resolved if TFG forces are trained and equipped by the region, Meles argued. (Comment: Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum both pointed out that time is of the essence in getting international community support for the partial lifting of the arms embargo so that the TFG

ADDIS ABAB 00001783 003 OF 004

could defend itself. end Comment.)

18. (C) Ethiopia's strategy that has so far been effective has been and continues to be to demonstrate to the ICU and the Fundamentalists that it is prepared to intervene militarily. Ethiopia has done this by being in touch with all parties in Somalia, especially the Ayr sub-clan of the Hawiye that are the real ICU force. The Ayr, according to Meles have told Ethiopia's interlocutors that they will not cross Ethiopia's red line by attacking Baidoa or by supporting armed insurgents in the border town of Beledweyne. "The risk of fighting has diminished; They are not life threatening at this point," Meles said. Still it is critical to get an agreement between the TFG and the ICU. He praised the USG support for the TFG and for the TFG - ICU dialogue, but he said more needs to be urgently done. The arms embargo must be lifted because it is a farce. Everyone can arm the Islamists and the UN has not lifted a finger. As a result the arms embargo favors the Islamists. The TFG needs to have proper arms and training so that the balance of forces will be tilted toward it not the ICU. Fortunately, with the Ethiopian contacts with the Ayr and the agreement of sorts between the TFG and the ICU under

the auspices of the Arab League, there is now a breathing space for the TFG to build up its force. But, Meles warned the TFG will have to do the fighting and to do so they will need training and arms.

¶9. (C) The IGAD Peace Keeping Force is one method of keeping the peace that can stabilize the situation, Meles said. However, if this is unworkable or is delayed the TFG can be reinforced by direct support -- assuming the lifting of the embargo - by its regional IGAD partners. If IGAD provides a Peace Keeping Force it could provide the legal frame work for the TFG to train and prepare. On the other hand if this is not possible the TFG can be directly beefed up. Ethiopia could violate the arms embargo to arm the TFG like Eritrea has done with the ICU but, "This is not a good way to go," Meles said. It would be much better for the TFG to be able to arm itself and acquire training legally whether via a Peace Support effort or directly from interested governments once the arms embargo on the TFG is lifted. In Meles' view the Islamists tide can be stemmed by strengthening the TFG and stopping ICU expansion. If the ICU is bottled up in Mogadishu, the differences in ideology and interests will divide the ICU, allowing the TFG to incorporate the healthy elements -- not Islamists -- within the ICU. (Comment: Meles understands the risks of Ethiopia going into Somalia and even the risks of Ethiopia arming/training the TFG, therefore it prefers a regional and legal approach. The bottom line remains that Ethiopia will not permit Somalia to turn into an Islamist state and to prevent this it will support and defend the TFG. end comment.)

¶10. (C) Meles said that if the USG takes the lead and announces a clear policy of support for the TFG then it can help stabilize Somalia. The region is willing, once it has a clear sign from the USG, to take on the requirements of assisting the TFG. The USG position is critical, for example when the USG was against lifting the arms embargo the region was paralyzed. Now that the USG is engaged, its leadership in Somalia can bring about positive change. The EU can also assist by providing the resources for development. The region itself will train and equip the TFG troops. Ethiopia would very much appreciate it if the USG would share, its plans with Ethiopia, Meles said. Ethiopia has kept the former and current American Ambassadors apprised of its activities. "We need to know what you are doing. We always let you know what we are doing," Meles argued.

¶11. (C) Assistant Secretary Frazer said she would take Meles' request back to Washington. She also promised that Washington would look at the arms embargo. At the Contact Group there was no agreement, she said. In the interim, the UK has proposed that the UN Security Council make a statement on Somalia. The UK-proposed statement says the UNSC will look forward to a detailed plan on the proposed IGAD force, and consider the arms embargo in that context, Frazer said. She went on to say that she will have to make recommendations, and "We don't have forever." Frazer asked if the IGAD force would hold to the original concept which was for IGAD to provide protection for the TFG officials to go into Mogadishu? She summed up by saying that she looks forward to considering Meles'

ADDIS ABAB 00001783 004 OF 004

recommendations and underlined that the international community prefers to support AU and IGAD positions.

¶12. (C) Before taking up the border questions, Meles returned again to Somalia saying that while the idea of IGAD peace keepers was good, it was not the essential condition. The fall back would be the TFG security plan. If the UNSC

would back up the TFG security plan then that would be sufficient. While the best case was IGAD peace support force, Meles doubted that it would fly, possibly because of the urgency of reinforcing the capability of the TFG.

¶13. (C) Comment: Although the situation in Somalia continues to evolve the feeling in Ethiopia and at the AU is that there is an increasing urgency to provide - either through IGAD peace keepers or directly -- military / police capacity to the TFG. If the ICU does not move on Baidoa there is still time to get this process started if the UN will lift the arms embargo on the TFG, as the AU and IGAD have requested. Ethiopia is ready to repel the ICU should it attack Baidoa but would prefer to deter future ICU advances and look to militarily strengthening TFG. PM Meles and FM Seyoum made it clear -- and AU Chairperson Konare in separate meetings concurred -- that Ethiopia must respond before an Islamist state is established next door. Dr. Frazer cleared this message.
HUDDLESTON